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Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Question of Cyprus

Security Council
Fifty-seventh year

Letter dated 9 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a letter dated 9 January 2002, addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex were circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 33 and 62, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Ümit **Pamir**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 9 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the statement made by the Greek Cypriot representative at the United Nations during the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, on 10 December 2001 under agenda item 33. The statement in question contains unfounded allegations against the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on the subject of preservation of cultural property.

I would like to emphasize that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus takes pride in its efforts to protect the cultural heritage of the island, utilizing its limited resources in the most effective way in maintaining and restoring all sites and monuments, irrespective of their historical and religious origins. For those incessant efforts, Turkish Cypriot authorities have received praise from foreign experts and observers who have visited the island on various occasions to study the situation. In addition to the restoration of archaeological monuments, sites have been put into everyday use, wherever applicable, in line with the universally accepted criteria and methods. The Rapporteur of the Committee of the Council of Europe, Ms. Vlasta Stepova, witnessed those efforts at first hand during her visit to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in October 1999. She visited, among other places, the St. Barnabas Monastery near Gazi Magosa, which is in use as a museum, and the ancient ruins of the city of Salamis, which is used as a venue for cultural events. She also praised the use of the Bellapais Monastery near Girne as a venue for concerts and exhibitions for the benefit of the public.

Greek Cypriot allegations of "plundering of cultural heritage" in Northern Cyprus have already been refuted by foreign experts and observers. The Rev. John B. Taylor, a distinguished member of the World Council of Churches, who visited Northern Cyprus in 1974 and 1975, found no evidence to support any of the Greek Cypriot allegations. Such observers as Jacques Dalibard of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Rev. Lars Carlzen, the Bishop of Stockholm and Senator Van Der Werff of the Council of Europe have all visited Northern Cyprus on different occasions and have made it publicly known that the Turkish Cypriot authorities are doing their utmost to protect the cultural heritage of the country.

The Greek Cypriot representative has stated that the island has an immense cultural heritage that "we have an obligation to protect and bequeath to future generations". Unfortunately, those words are not borne out by the actual deeds of the Greek Cypriot administration. Between 1963 and 1974, 103 mosques and other Turkish-Islamic shrines and antiquities all around the island were deliberately destroyed by the Greek Cypriots. The historic Bayraktar Mosque, which stands as a symbol of centuries-old Turkish-Islamic heritage of the island, has been the target of bombing and arson attacks over the years. It was bombed in 1962 and again in 1964. It sustained an arson attack in February 1994. The 400-year-old Araplar Mosque was attacked with explosives in March 1994. The historic Omeriye Mosque was the target of an arson attack in August 1996 that damaged its historic structure. In August 1999, the Hala Sultan Tekke, a most prominent holy shrine for the Muslim world, came under attack when its door was forced open by Greek Cypriot arsonists who poured petrol over the interior surface and set it ablaze.

In addition to such blatant acts of wilful destruction, the remaining Turkish architectural sites in Southern Cyprus in general are faced with the threat of disintegration due to the lack of any effort for their preservation on the part of the Greek Cypriot authorities.

Against that background, we hope that the international community will urge the Greek Cypriot administration to abandon its double standards with respect to the cultural heritage of the island and instead to show respect for the ethnic and cultural identity of the Turkish Cypriot people, in line with the necessary spirit of accommodation for facilitating an early settlement between the two States in Cyprus.

(*Signed*) Aytuğ **Plümer**
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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Security Council

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Letter dated 7 January 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I am writing to you in connection with the forthcoming item on the agenda of the Security Council, entitled "The situation in Croatia", dealing with the mandate of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP).

As members of the Security Council are aware, the root causes of the dispute over Prevlaka were the emerging security issues related to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the Milosević regime's disrespect for the internationally recognized borders of the newly emerged States, coupled with its ambition of territorial expansion. However, in all Security Council resolutions and other United Nations resolutions, the territorial integrity of Croatia within its internationally recognized borders was never questioned. The Prevlaka issue was, therefore, exclusively perceived as a security question. The Republic of Croatia, throughout this period, tried to discuss ways to overcome the security concerns of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with the old regime in Belgrade, but to no avail. In this regard, we would like to restate that the Republic of Croatia is ready to solve all possible security concerns of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia through the demilitarization of the broader area on both sides of the border.

With the change of Government in Belgrade, bilateral talks have resumed. It is encouraging that the new authorities share the view that, after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the borders of the republics which have become independent represent international borders and should be respected. In this respect, an Inter-State Commission was established in December 2001 in order to work jointly on the identification of the land border and the delimitation of the sea border. We hope that this Inter-State Commission will be able to start its work as soon as possible, in good faith, with the aim of completing its task in the shortest period of time.

The Republic of Croatia commends the work of UNMOP and we are grateful for its contribution through the monitoring of the demilitarization. Greater confidence-building and stability in the region have been created by enhanced freedom of movement on the peninsula as a result of the opening of the border crossings of Debeli Brijeg and Konfin, pursuant to the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the authorities of Montenegro. Bilateral relations between the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are steadily improving as well, and since the security situation in Prevlaka does not

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represent a threat to peace and security in the region anymore, the members of the Security Council should consider ending the mandate of UNMOP. Moreover, we are confident that, with the positive attitude of the new Government in Belgrade, the two countries are ready to conclude this issue successfully. Meanwhile, a transitional border regime could also be agreed upon.

In this regard and in good faith, taking also into account the stage of the process of defining the status of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its republics, the Republic of Croatia is ready to accept the last extension of the UNMOP mandate for the next six months. We invite the members of the Security Council to declare that the UNMOP mandate will terminate on 15 July 2002, to support the demilitarization of the area on both sides of the border and to stress the need for the swift finalization of the work of the Inter-State Commission for the identification of the land border and the delimitation of the sea border.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Ivan **Šimonović**
Permanent Representative